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ABSTRACT

Over the last sixteen years, part-time teachers have become the coolies, or the burden bearers of the academic community. Used mostly to teach lower-level basic classes, they have increased in number from 36,420 in 1968 to 330,000 in 1985. Research about part timers began in the late 1970s with Howard Tuckman, who tried to find systematic and comprehensive ways of classifying the group. Since that time some research has been done; but while part timers have begun to have an identity nationally, they still have no documented past and no careful guide to policymaking for the future. Policy decisions that have affected part timers include the 1972 Carnegie Commission on Higher Education's report, which indicated that in order for institutions to maintain budgetary flexibility and to reduce the expenditures in higher education by 20% in the 1970s, they needed to hire part-time faculty. Future policymaking for part timers may include unionization and more humane planning. Issues needing to be addressed include pay and benefits; security rights, including responsibility and authority; enfranchisement in governance; and procedural rules for the resolution of disagreements. (EL)

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Of Coolies, Rickshaws, and Part-Time Teachers

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Of Coolies, Rickshaws, and Part-Time Teachers

Over the last sixteen years, part-time teachers have become the coolies, the burden-bearers, of the academic community. In 1968, there were 36,420 part timers in our colleges and universities, but by 1985, the National Center for Educational Statistics estimates that that earlier number will grow to 330,000.¹ This tenfold growth will have taken place during a time when student enrollments peaked in 1980, then declined nationally. While the hiring of part-time teachers increased and the student enrollment decreased during that same time, the hiring of full-time faculty has changed only marginally since 1975, with the net change being an estimated decline from 440,000 full-timers in 1975 to 432,000 in 1985.² Since the greatest number of part-timers is used to teach "lower-level basic classes"³--such as required courses in English, math, speech, and foreign languages--these statistics affect us directly as composition teachers. Yet there's much more than statistical significance in these numbers; there are the lives of friends and colleagues.

If we move closer to some of the 330,000, we can begin to hear their stories. Cara Chell, a college teacher in Indiana, tells about her life as a part-time lecturer, graduate student, and wife in "Memoirs and Confessions of a Part-Time Lecturer." As she recounts a conversation with an unnamed friend, Chell reveals in only a few words much about who she is, who I am, and how different our places are in higher education. She writes

A friend, a "real" professor, discusses my situation heatedly. It's a national debate, says my friend. Are we going to create a lower class of academics to do the dirty work of our departments? Although one of the schools where I teach has already done precisely that, I'd never really thought about us part-timers as a "class." To her urgent questions, I listlessly reply, "I have no idea." A coolie has a hard time understanding the politics of the rickshaw.⁴

With a tone of some bitterness and anger in her prose, Chell identifies herself as a coolie. Although that image might for a moment seem racist, another moment reveals its aptness for her predicament as a part-timer. She is a small, marginal person, hired for a short time, paid a little, carrying a large burden, and finding no lasting obligation from the person who hired her.

Chell implicitly identifies me, too. Who am I? I am a well-meaning colleague, a male colleague--one of those many graying (now rapidly graying) tenured male professors in English Departments across the country. I am someone who sees a national debate being carried on, one in which part-timers have only recently become a large visible "class" of employees in higher education. I also see that the lives of people in their part-time jobs on the one hand and colleges and universities in their need for flexibility and economy on the other hand, have somehow been set against each other. In my role here, I intend to offer some evidence and commentary in this national debate, where, as yet, a surprisingly small amount of scholarship is available--

whether anecdotal, statistical, or analytical--to point out issues or carry discussions toward worthwhile policy decisions.

One might think that a flood of research would appear in this area, considering that part-timers now comprise more than forty percent of all college and university faculty. And yet, it was only in the late 1970's that Howard Tuckman, a prominent researcher in the subject of part-time faculty, first asked the fundamental question, "Who Is Part-Time in Academe?"⁵ Then he tried to find systematic, comprehensive ways of classifying that large and diverse group. Before that time, part-timers had no national group identity, though the National Center for Educational Statistics estimates that there were 336,000 part-timers in academe during 1978, the year that Tuckman's essay was published.⁶

From that time to the present, researchers have gathered and analyzed some information about part-timers in higher education which should be mentioned here. In 1978, Jossey-Bass Publishing Company printed Employing Part-Time Faculty as #18 in its series New Directions in Institutional Research; The American Sociologist printed a symposium in its November issue that same year. In 1981, the Ford Foundation supported the AAUP's Part-Time Faculty Series, a cluster of six articles by Howard Tuckman, Jaime Caldwell, and William Vogler about issues related to part-time teachers.⁷ That same year Current Issues in Higher Education, #4, printed Part-Time Faculty in Colleges and Universities, which examined collegial status, legal position, and faculty development for part-timers in higher education. Finally, in 1982, David Leslie, Samuel Kellams, and G. Manny

Gunne published Part-Time Faculty in American Higher Education,⁸ the first attempt at a comprehensive national study of part-timers.

Besides that work based on national information-gathering, regional materials are available through ERIC, now that "part-time" has become an ERIC descriptor. Three such studies that caught my attention concern community colleges in the Kansas City area, the use of part-timers in the Maryland system of higher education, and a conference in New York State, April, 1982, "Campus Bargaining at the Crossroads."⁹ As well, there must be any number of locally written yet unpublished papers. Two from my own university are Susan Danielson and Jay Margulies's "Nothing Personal: Part-Time Teachers in Higher Education." It is important because it documents the way the first part-time union local in the United States, AFT Local 3571, was formed in Portland, Oregon, during the late 1970's. The second unpublished paper is Jane Braunger's "A Case for Pro-Rata Pay for Part-Time Faculty in Community Colleges." It is important because it straightforwardly asserts the need for paying part-time faculty equitably as professionals.

While it appears now that part-timers have begun to have an identity nationally, they still have no documented past and no careful guide to policy-making for the future. In all the available research, I found only a brief mention of the way part-time faculty came to be in American education. Robert Blackburn wrote two pages on "the historical record" of the part-timers. He noted in passing that the first college staffs in the United

States were made up from people outside academia; he added that most were ministers "serving part-time in the classroom and destined to leave for a full-time career in the parish in a few years."¹⁰ Let me add two notes to Blackburn, one historical and the other social. When the American Home Missionary Society sent the Reverend Thomas Condon west to the Oregon Territory in the early nineteenth century, it empowered him to convert people to Christianity and to serve that Christian community, but it paid him so little that he had to start an elementary school and become a part-time teacher in order to survive. However, the Missionary Society didn't approve of his part-time work; he was supposed to accept the burden of his severe life as a condition of being a full-time missionary,¹¹ and to perform for the honor of being given that wonderful and fearful responsibility.

Socially, we Americans have identified our burden-bearers, let them know who they are, and have expected them to carry that burden so that we can get on with our lives. Martin Joos discusses this burden-fixing in the "responsibility" section of The Five Clocks, where he writes:

The community's survival depends on cooperation; and adequate cooperation depends on recognizing the more and the less responsible types of persons around us. We need to identify the natural burden-bearers of the community so that we can give them the responsibility which is heaviest of all: we make them responsible for cooperation itself.¹²

It appears that ministers and part-time teachers are linked together as two kinds of responsible people who need to carry that heaviest load of all in the community.

All this research and commentary is valuable only if it leads to the best policy decisions that can be made about employing part-timers in academe. Yet the central recommendations that keep part-timers being hired entrepreneurially, as they are now, were made in 1972, six years before Howard Tuckman asked his most basic of questions: "Who is Part-Time in Academe?" The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, the source of those recommendations, reported in 1972 that institutions needed to maintain budgetary flexibility in the face of shifting or declining enrollments and, furthermore, that institutions needed to reduce the expenditures on higher education by 20% in the 1970's. The Commission recommended "achieving a significant increase in the student-faculty ratio. . . ," "provided it [could] be accomplished without sacrificing quality"¹³ In order to carry out these plans, the Commission said that central administration may need to hire more temporary and part-time faculty members in the late 1970's.¹⁴ (Mayhew, p. 45). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, there were already 204,000 part-time faculty in academe when it made its recommendations.¹⁵

These policies, largely unexamined, have found their way into contemporary debates on the use of part-timers as regularly as a litany in a church service. For example, in a symposium on collective bargaining in New York State (Annual Conference of the National Center for Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions), Nancy Hodges, Deputy Director in the Governor's Office of Employee Relations, argued that part-

time faculty should be used to respond quickly to shifts in enrollment, budget cuts, and changes in student interest.¹⁶

Her argument was based on fiscal accountability and was anti-union. The speaker holding an opposing point of view was Nuala McGann Drescher, President of United University Professors.

Although arguing in favor of including part-time faculty in unions, Drescher agreed that they should be used to help "respond quickly and positively to substantial shifts in enrollment from year to year or even semester to semester."¹⁷

(p. 67) Although Drescher argues for the well-being of part-time faculty, he also believes that they should be used "to prevent retrenchment of full-time staff."¹⁸

It is past time to stop implicitly accepting the recommendations of the Carnegie Commission from twelve years ago and to start analyzing both how effectively those policies have been carried out and how they have influenced the colleges and universities where we work. Yet so far, I have found only scattered remarks on future policy-making for employing part-time faculty in academe. While Nuala Drescher has unknowingly accepted some of those Carnegie Commission recommendations, at least he argues for bringing the part-timers into the union and letting the union bargain for them. That has become one solution to the abusive hiring of part-timers--to join a union. While unionizing may hurt those entrepreneurs and con artists who bargain well individually for themselves in nearly any adversary situation, it offers the majority a systematic solution to the problem--that is, professional status, salary, fringe benefits, and working conditions for all--rather than having a department

head or upper-management administrator carry on year after year with ad hoc policies that finally become institutionalized through custom and past practice. That is usually a way of creating institution-wide hardship for part-timers.

It is now time to recognize that colleges and universities have to run on more than cost effectiveness and better management. Fortunately, some researchers finally do speak to the need for humane planning. In the conclusion of Part-Time Faculty in American Higher Education, Leslie, Kellams, and Gunne do press several issues urgently: quality, access, efficiency, responsibility, and fairness. They do not work solely from an accountability model; they give cautions and express hopes about other values as well. Above all, they assert that "part-timers should be granted the same human and professional rights accorded to all employees."¹⁹ Within that framework, they recognize some limits, particularly limits on efficiency. They see indirect costs that are usually not mentioned when the subject of part-timers comes up; those indirect costs are measured in "administrative overhead, in deteriorated communication and coordination, in latent conflict, and in discontinuity."²⁰ They may be implying here that the use of part-timers strictly to reduce educational costs has more than reached its limit; it may be that the way part-time slots are used--not the part-time faculty themselves--has become destructive to higher education.

Leslie, Kellams, and Gunne, furthermore, press the need for institutions to consider part-time employment at the policy level, rather than the "free-wheeling department-level allocation

of available faculty slots."²¹ Pay and benefits; security rights, including seniority, academic freedom, and tenure; lines of responsibility and authority; enfranchisement in governance; and procedural rules for the resolution of disagreements--all these issues, they assert, need to be addressed, though few have been. Finally, they tentatively state that they favor individual contracts for part-timers because of the myriad diversity of circumstances among those faculty in academe.

Besides the individual contract or the union contract, professional organizations may also offer help in policy planning for the future of part-timers; once information has been gathered to help guide humane policy making, guidelines like those of the Modern Language Association, if taken seriously, may be another place from which any individual college or university may try to plan. The MLA Guidelines contain three separate points having to do 1) with long-range planning for part-time and full-time faculty; 2) with treating part-timers as professionals and following processes broadly comparable to those established for full-time faculty; and 3) with establishing a group of permanent part-time teachers.²² This last element is much more than the old labor pool because it mentions that teachers "should receive appropriate fringe benefits and incentives that foster professional development, for example, merit raises and access to research and travel funds."

Surely, since all members of the CCCC teach those "basic level required courses," members of the CCCC are at least as directly affected as those in the MLA by the disorganized way the

hiring of composition teachers takes place and the unprofessional way part-timers are treated on the job. Yet, to my knowledge, the CCCC has made no statement on professional status, salary, fringe benefits, or working conditions of the part-time faculty in academe. It is high time for this organization to make its statement, adopt its guidelines, and lobby with its own administrators to plan for the future hiring of part-timers. Though it means taking a risk, we can stop burden-fixing in the college and university; we can stop hiring new coolies from the labor pool. Only then will it become possible to move systematically beyond institutional hardship through intelligent planning, guided by the most recent scholarly information available, and to move towards policy making and equity. Let us resolve to replace institutional hardship with institutional equity.

NOTES

¹Digest of Educational Statistics, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1982, p. 107.

²1981-1982 Fact Book for Administrators, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1982, p. 114.

³Nancy Hodges, "The Use and Abuse of Part-Timers I: Casual Employees: Scabs, or Saviours?" Campus Bargaining at the Crossroads: Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the Professions, Resources in Education, April, 1982, p. 63.

⁴College English, 44 (January 1982), p. 63.

⁵AAUP Bulletin, 64 (December 1978), pp. 305-15.

⁶Digest of Educational Statistics, 1982, p. 107.

⁷"The 'Part' in Part-Time Wages"; "Who is Part-Time in Academe?" "The Fringes of a Fringe Group: Part-Timers in Academe"; "The Determinants of Variations in Earnings among Part-Time Faculty"; "Part-Time Employment and Career Progression"; "Part-Timers and the Academic Labor Market of the Eighties."

⁸New York: Praeger, 1982.

⁹Tim Peterson, "Part-Time Faculty Compensation and Staff Development in Three Kansas City Area Community Colleges" (ED 225 615), "Trends in the Characteristics of Faculty in Maryland Public Institutions of Higher Education" (ED 217 794), and "Campus Bargaining at the Crossroads."

¹⁰"Part-Time Faculty and the Production of Knowledge," Employing Part-Time Faculty, ed David W. Leslie, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1978, p. 100.

¹¹Egbert Oliver, Thomas Condon of Oregon, Portland, Oregon: First Congregational Church, 1983, n. pag.

¹²New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1967, p. 14.

¹³Lewis B. Mayhew, The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1973, p. 42.

¹⁴Mayhew, p. 45.

¹⁵Digest of Educational Statistics, 1982, p. 107.

¹⁶Hodges, p. 58.

¹⁷Drescher, p. 67.

¹⁸Drescher.

¹⁹Leslie, Kellams, and Gunne, p. 145.

²⁰Leslie, Kellams, and Gunne, p. 142.

²¹Leslie, Kellams, and Gunne, p. 143.

²²"Modern Language Association Statement on the Use of Part-Time Faculty," developed by an ad hoc committee of the Associated Departments of English, n. d.